

IWWK2 2010

Lesley Shingleton 'enjoys' the Introduction to White Water Kayaking Course summer 2010

If anyone had told the IWWK summer class at the start that they would be swept down rapids at Symonds Yak upside down and banging on the bottom of their kayak for a Tee rescue, they would have laughed their heads off and told Ian, the course leader. that he was insane. The question is, would any normal person voluntarily sign up to do that? Well 15 of us did in June this year, and all lived to tell their tales of cuts and bruises and oh yeah the absolutely fantastic, exhilarating, challenging and life affirming time that they all had, plus meeting some truly great people and having one hell of a laugh in the process.

Just for the record Pete has the largest lungs of any living creature I know and spends his spare time weighing himself down to the bottom of pools, seemingly not bothered if he is rescued:



The rest of us slightly more sane people just gave up and bailed and prayed to God that one of the fantastic coaches would rescue our kayak, paddle, packed lunch, makeup bag, and then of course us!



But that was the end of the tale and I'm missing out the long story preceding it of self discovery and mastery over some shrunken canoe called a kayak on Regents canal!

My first lesson taught me this, that what you think is a canoe, isn't - it's a kayak, it's not an oar it's a paddle and that we don't row up the canal we paddle up the canal, and in a straight line if possible trying not to tip over any other kayaker and avoid anything larger than you.

Well this course is nothing if it doesn't throw you in at the deep end which is exactly what the pool sessions proved to be.....turn yourself over, pull the cag and get out of the kayak without drowning says Christine (another coach). This sounds easy until the next instruction - turn yourself over, don't get out, tap on the bottom of the boat and then stroke it and wait for some kind passer-by kayaker to whizz over and rescue you.

If that wasn't enough you then have to find the rescuing kayak with your hands and haul yourself up and around remembering that your head comes out last....last, all you can think about is getting your head out of the water to breath and exhale the two tons of water from up your nose.....Top tip here: invest in nose clip for pool sessions, and goggles and an oxygen tank, oh and don't forget your towel which I seemed to do constantly!

The sessions were very useful though, as the group were soon to discover, with our first outing to a real river with real white water and something or someone called Eddie, (soon to be a great friend and a respite to weary arms) and then the weirs.....at Shepperton. Now a great lesson for this trip is to listen to the coach, and when he says don't hold onto the bridge above the weir, just go straight down using a stern rudder, that is exactly what you do! Please don't do as I did; cling onto the top of the bridge weeping at the prospect of what was below, wondering what the hell you're doing on a Saturday morning, slightly hung over, hurling yourself over what appears to be a sheer drop in a kayak, with a very irate coach (Paul) at the bottom shouting at the top of his voice 'Let go and get down here now!!!' Wise words..... if I had listened I probably would not have found myself falling down sideways landing face down in a pool of water and rocks and having to hand roll myself back up.... although saying that I can boast at being the only group member to have mastered the hand roll in an inch of water and I was still laughing and so was Paul!! So up to you....

Well the group was now definitely starting to.. well let's say.. stay afloat in a kayak, and learn a whole new vocabulary of essential paddling strokes, with words such as bow rudder, stern rudder, edging, sweep strokes,.....when just as all seemed settled we were told that we now needed to apply these strokes in a vessel 2 times the size and with another person....a canoe. This seemed like a whole new ball game and not quite what we have all signed up for, but it was excellent fun and an opportunity to be a bigger fish on the canal and charge up and down like Vikings in a long boat.

I'm wondering if Tom in the photo below wasn't having thoughts about pursuing a career in canoeing - note the nose clip looks like he is resigned to the fact he's going under with no hope up against a double canoe!



Well the final lesson at the canal came, and preparations were made for the Grand Finale of this introductory journey, our plan to whip the rapids at Symonds Yat.....

We all would have arrived earlier, that is of course if the drivers had had clear driving instructions and not turned too early and driven up the smallest and steepest road in Monmouth. I can quite honestly say that I have never seen a 20 point turn done on an eye of a needle in a 4X4 with such a look of fear on the driver's face, (mainly I'm sure because Paul would have killed Christine if his pride and joy had got scratched!).....but that was just the start of the weekend!!!

After a good night's rest, packed lunches made, kayaks off, wet gear on we were ready for our biggest challenge yet down the river Wye and into the white water. We were cheered on by the onlooking public, we were brave and gallant and ready for anything....well almost! A few ferry glides across the first mini rapids and a trial at some real Eddies set the

scene for our first capsize and bail and at the next set of mini rapids a swim. Unfortunately, the coach had omitted to show us the defensive swimming position but not to worry as lunch break was an ideal opportunity for some on shore defensive swimming practice....can't you tell?! Nothing like strengthening those abdominals and shedding a few calories from all those cheese sandwiches and chocolate bars.....



We were off again in search of more white water, only to be distracted by some killer death mound, which was screaming out to be leapt off, in a kayak of course.....Some claimed it was 7 meters high, others claimed that it was possible to do a 360 degree spin off, but most just gritted teeth with sheer joy and hoped to be rescued!

Now the journey down to the main rapids is about 8K so to keep ourselves amused and of course focused, coach Mark gave us some top tips on how to paddle using our core muscles rather than just relying on our small biceps. He told us to imagine holding a beach ball between our stomachs and the paddle but the group were just hoping that no passerbys were witnessing this rather amusing scene in the middle of the river - after the lunch time action we were really starting to look like a keep fit group!!



Then we arrived at the main rapid at Symonds Yat.



Pupils anxious as to whether they could remember each stroke to get into an eddy and read the water flow, coaches anxious if the pupils would make it or if this was going to be the first carnage group, had their coaching worked and were the pupils ready....Yes we were and what enormous fun, heart racing and sheer satisfaction it was to all, to run the

rapid and then to try and run it in a controlled fashion..... some more than others.....which eddie did you say to wait in.....!!!!

Second day even more fun, racing down the rapids, what did a few minor knocks and cuts matter - we were actually doing what we set out to do all those weeks ago and it was fab.....

Then for some cooling down with some really wild defensive swimming in action.



Inevitably the weekend came to an end and so did our introduction to white water kayaking course. With great sadness we all packed and left for London, but with a smile on our faces and memories which will last a life-time. So were we insane? Most definitely, but I reckon we are all up for doing it all over again very soon.

The summer group 2010 would like to thank all our fabulous course coaches for giving up their time and supporting us throughout the sessions, and in particular to Ian Tokelove for organising it.